

# FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk)

May 2006

## CUTS FIGHTBACK

Members battle to  
save local fire services

# BACK TO WORK

Ready, willing and able



## Dying for a fag

'Firesafe' cigarettes  
could save lives



## No more hollow praise, Mr Blair

Retained  
firefighter's  
challenge to  
PM



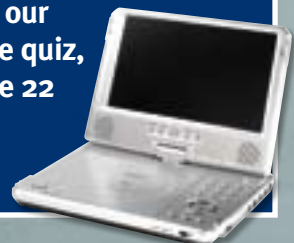
## He shot the sheriff...

... firefighters on strike  
and it's England  
fans next



## Win a portable DVD player

See our  
prize quiz,  
page 22



# The never ending story



Our members in a number of brigades are again facing up to the local cuts agenda. In Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Humberside FBU members have been considering strike ballots. Indeed, by the time this article is printed these ballots may be underway or even have been completed and we may be facing the prospect of further industrial action at local level.

Yet again the story is one of local fire authorities and chief fire officers ignoring the views of our members at a stage where industrial action could have been avoided. All fire authorities are required to go through the process of drawing up Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs). This requires consultation at local level. This includes consultation with the FBU – the people who have to actually deliver fire and emergency cover on the ground.

FBU members are the real experts, they are the ones who deliver this service and ensure that it remains a service to be proud of. When we respond to IRMP proposals we do so by drawing on that expertise. Our officials and rank and file members carry out a great deal of work to address the issues raised by the IRMP process. Yet the report we hear time after time is that our views have been ignored or dismissed. Sometimes the FBU response is noted and a response drawn up. Unfortunately, all too often this is just paying lip service and no real consultation takes place. The

whole thing is seen as a sham by local firefighters – and indeed by local communities.

## Service worth defending

But this is not what the fire and rescue service should be like. It is an outstanding service that we should be proud of. Despite all the adverse propaganda, firefighters are hugely respected in their communities. This is a service to be proud of and worthy of defending.

The fire and rescue service should be under the control of the local community through their elected representatives. Yet when it comes to shutting fire stations and making other cuts the voice of the community is ignored.

And where do we end up? We end up with firefighters who (rightly) feel that they have not been listened to. We end up with members of the community who become ever more cynical about politics because their views are ignored. And we end up with firefighters being forced to consider industrial action. The introduction of IRMPs, the abolition of national standards, the drive for the cuts agenda – all these produce a situation where FBU members feel there is no alternative but to start down the road of industrial action.

## Cuts will provoke response

We can only hope that members of fire authorities will start to realise that they cannot endlessly make cuts without provoking a response. We can only hope that chief fire officers realise that the views of the people on the ground cannot be ignored without undermining morale



and creating the conditions for a reaction. We can hope. But while things are as they are, while FBU members continue to face the attacks that they are facing, then these local disputes are likely to continue.

I know that this union will

continue to provide complete support to members forced into taking action at local level. I do not yet know exactly what will happen in the brigades mentioned above. By the time we go to print there may be other disputes on the way. I





simply urge every member to give complete support to your colleagues – your brothers and sisters – who may have to take industrial action to defend the fire service and their conditions. It is the right thing to do.  
**Matt Wrack**

## YOUR LETTERS

### Not right to promote Abortion Rights

*Firefighter* magazine (April 2006) carried an article in support of abortion and a postcard promoting the campaign of Abortion Rights. I know that the FBU is affiliated to the organisation, but is it right that we should be doing the promotional work for such a personal and emotive subject?

The FBU has the courage to voice its views on many worthwhile subjects. It has stood up for those in need in many parts of the world. But this totally one-sided and emotive article was short on facts and high on emotional pressure. The use of a full page picture showing a poor woman holding a child outside a tin hut was ridiculous. What it really showed was that we should be fighting harder to abolish poverty, so that the woman can have the right to keep her child in good health the way we do.

**Michael Barron, Doncaster**

### Abortion not civilised

I am not unsympathetic to the tough choices and decisions that people are faced with today but how can we possibly justify such a primitive approach to the solving of one person's difficulty at the expense of another?

**Joe Quinn, Strathclyde**

### Offensive

Did the Union give permission for the *Firefighter* magazine to contain Abortion Rights postcards? If so, I take offence.

**Dave Cook, Essex**

**Editor's comment:** The distribution of the Abortion Rights postcard in *Firefighter* magazine was a decision of the FBU Executive Council. It is FBU policy, in line with the TUC, to campaign for a woman's right to choose, support the Abortion Rights campaign and oppose the Bush Administration's Global Gag.

→ We do not publish letters where only an email address is supplied, please include full postal address and/or membership number. We may edit letters.

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## PUZZLES

**WIN**  
**A PORTABLE**  
**DVD PLAYER**  
**see p22**

Take part in our prize quiz and win a 8.5-inch screen portable DVD player. This month test your knowledge of fire in literature and you could win a Shinco SDP 6820 with Dolby digital sound output; an HDCD decoder; zoom and frame-by-frame play; a built in anti-shock system; video-out capabilities; and a USB port for an optional TV tuner.



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# News

**MAY 2006**

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The North East's new regional control centre under construction at Belmont Business Park



## Nothing going on but the rent

### Fire Control Project set to bust its £988m budget

#### CONTROL CAMPAIGN

**T**he FireControl Project looks set to bust its £988 million budget according to latest figures. Instead of the “major investment” it is billed as, much of the money will be spent on rent.

The rental costs of the buildings alone, excluding London, could account for as much as £312 million of the total over the 20-year lease periods being negotiated for each of the controls. The private sector will build the centres with fire authorities picking up the rent and maintenance costs.

The planned regional control for Yorkshire and Humberside will see the fire and rescue authorities pay an annual rent of £1,197,500. VAT at 17.5% would add nearly

£210,000 a year bringing the rent to a total of £1,407,500 a year.

There will be rent increases of 12.5% in one block at five years, ten years and fifteen years. The total rent alone over 20 years is likely to be in the region of £39 million for each of the eight regional controls.

This excludes the cost of the new London control, stamp duty and what are likely to be high building insurance costs. These are likely to push the cost over £400 million for the buildings alone.

Those rental costs (and it is possible the VAT element could be avoided) would leave only £588 million to spend over 20 years on one of the most complex IT structures ever attempted. Staffing costs would be on top, which ODPM has always said will make up

a considerable amount of the budget.

Fire authority advisors have also given dire warnings of “draconian” penalties if the terms of the lease are breached. The Government says the project will not go ahead if the final financial case is not made – but have signed agreements to lease.

FBU President Ruth Winters said: “This has all the hallmarks of another Government disaster waiting to happen. It’s already way over the original cost estimates and looks set to bust even the latest budget.

“They still don’t know if it will work and how it will work. Making it up as they go along is not an acceptable approach.

“Once again it would appear that Government dogma is prevailing over public need and common sense.”

# FBU slams Devon and Somerset merger plan

## DEVON AND SOMERSET MERGER

**T**he FBU has slammed the proposed amalgamation of Devon and Somerset fire authorities, describing the business case of the two authorities as a “knee jerk” reaction to insufficient funding provided for the modernisation process being driven by Government.

The Union says the business case has been “rushed” and is “incomplete” and fails to address the key issue as to whether the amalgamation will improve the service provided to the public in the two counties.

FBU South West official Val Hampshire said the counties were “under enormous pressure to deliver against a centrally driven change agenda” while not receiving adequate financial support from their respective fire authorities to deliver and build on the service currently in place.

“The FBU is wholly unconvinced that the appropriate solution for the pressures that both services face is through a full amalgamation.

“We believe the draft business case raises far more questions than it answers and that, rather than providing a solution, it is a ‘knee jerk’ reaction to a centrally driven, unaccountable and inappropriate process



The West Country: Devon and Somerset amalgamation business case “rushed” and “incomplete”

of inspection through the comprehensive performance assessment.

“It is unreasonable and unacceptable to expect any representative body to make a full response with regard to the merger based on the current business case. The business case report has been rushed and is incomplete with regard to evidence, investigation and assessment.

“The question when considering change will always be: ‘how will this make our Service better?’

“We regret that after consideration of the business case that question remains unanswered.”

# Trade union rights on political agenda

## UNION FREEDOM BILL

Calls for a Trade Union Freedom Bill are now firmly on the political agenda and are cascading through the structures of the trade union movement.

Trade unions and the TUC have discussed and agreed the main principles of the Bill and it was the clarion call for this year’s national and regional May Day events.

This Bill is about giving

trade unionists the tools, when required, to ensure their members receive fairness at work.

It will contain five basic principles:

- ◆ Better protection for striking workers
- ◆ Simpler and fairer industrial action balloting and notice procedures
- ◆ Restrictions on the use of injunctions by employers
- ◆ Solidarity action in certain circumstances will be allowed

◆ The use of replacement labour during strikes will be prevented.

Trade union freedom to call industrial action is less today than it was 100 years ago, despite such freedoms being enshrined in international law for 50 years.

→ Seek your MP’s support for the Bill by asking them to sign Early Day Motion number 1170. Visit [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk) and follow the ‘Lobby Your MP’ link For more information, see [www.ier.org.uk](http://www.ier.org.uk)

## Sounding off!

**PETER ANDREW BANNER**

Retained firefighter, Norfolk

### We don’t need any more hollow praise

I am a 38-year-old retained firefighter in Cromer North Norfolk. I live with my three children in a very rural area where second home owners are driving up house prices to unaffordable levels and employment is scarce or mostly seasonal.

Despite the lack of work, I have always strived to provide and succeeded in keeping in regular gainful employment against the odds. And I try to put something back into the community.

Being a firefighter working the retained duty system requires a large level of commitment.

From the point of joining you give up your holiday time to cram in courses and get your competence level to ride the appliance as well as keep on top of the paperwork, answer calls and other demands that are placed upon you initially to make the grade. In Norfolk, there are only a few whole time stations. My colleagues and I working the retained duty system are the fire service in most of the county.

Despite this, my last four employers have not been supportive or sympathetic to my retained duties, dismissing me or disposing of my services arguing that my retained employment status was disruptive. On each occasion I have been informed I do not qualify to receive any jobseekers allowance or any financial assistance at all from any quarter.

Out of work since December, I am now at the end of my patience and finances. And I am appalled at the way I have been penalised for trying to serve the community.

It is argued that businesses are under constant pressures, but whom do they call when emergencies arise? It’s a case of double standards, from hero to zero status.

I am not alone in this situation, but we retained firefighters have no protection from the moment our alerter goes off. We only have the goodwill of employers. And there’s not much of that around. Then they wonder why so many retained vacancies remain unfilled!

This sorry state of affairs cannot go on. We don’t need any more hollow praise. The motto of Norfolk Brigade is “Let us be judged by our actions”: that’s what we expect now from Government.

→ This is an edited version of a letter to Prime Minister Tony Blair. For more information on the FBU’s campaign on retained recruitment and retention visit [www.fbu.org.uk/retained](http://www.fbu.org.uk/retained)





MARK PINDER/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Protest demanding fair pay for public sector workers and anti-privatisation, Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2002

# FBU joins campaign against privatisation

## PUBLIC SERVICES

**T**he FBU has joined a raft of public sector unions in a new campaign to defend public services from cuts and privatisation.

The Public Services – Not Private Profit campaign includes trade unions from across the public sector – ASLEF, CWU, CYWU, NAPO, NATFHE, NUI, NUS, NUT, PCS, POA, RMT, TSSA – as well as supportive MPs, and organisations representing those who depend upon our public services.

In health, education, local

government, prisons and probation and in every department of central government the Government is forcing services into the private sector, threatening thousands of jobs, as well as pay, pensions and conditions of employment.

At the campaign's launch meeting March 28, FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack slammed the cuts pursued by fire authorities in Northumberland, Cleveland, Lothian and Borders, West Yorkshire and in Hertfordshire, and hit out at "creeping privatisation" in the UK fire and rescue service, from

PFI fire stations to contracting out core services such as fleet and the supply and management of fire kit.

"We don't want privateers running our fire service and we don't want Government mortgaging our future. And we don't want cuts that threaten lives and the health and safety of firefighters at the frontline. What we do want is proper funding to maintain what is the finest fire service in the world," he said.

→ There will be a rally and mass lobby of Parliament: 11am-4pm, 27 June, Central Hall, Westminster.

## FBU COMMUNICATIONS

### Keep informed with the e-bulletin!

Some 17,000 FBU members and officials now receive the FBU e-bulletin, other FBU campaign news and information on Union services by email. If you do not yet get the e-bulletin, subscribe now: go to [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk), type in your email address on the bottom left hand side of the home page and hit the "Sign up" button.



## FBU EDUCATION

### 2006 gay and lesbian school

Interested in attending this year's FBU Gay and Lesbian School? It will be at Wortley Hall, Sheffield, 20-22 October 2006. Applications can be obtained from Rich – [reg10gl@fsmail.net](mailto:reg10gl@fsmail.net) or Yannick – [yanndubois785@hotmail.com](mailto:yanndubois785@hotmail.com).



## In brief

◆ FBU members and officials expressed solidarity with local government workers across the UK on March 28 against detrimental changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme. FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack and President Ruth Winters visited picket lines in Hertfordshire as they attended the rally against fire service cuts in the brigade (see pages 14-15).

◆ Record numbers of Scottish firefighters are suffering from stress-related disorders. Figures released under the Freedom of Information Act show that psychological illness led to the loss of 6,556 working days in the Strathclyde area alone last year, a four-fold increase on 2002. In a number of Scottish regions the number of firefighters off with stress increased over the past five years. Brian Sweeney, Strathclyde chief fire officer, said attacks on firefighters were to blame.

◆ The FBU Parliamentary Group, chaired by John McDonnell MP (right) continues to grow and now has 40 MPs, up from 30 when it launched just over a year ago. The work of the group in lobbying ministers and raising FBU issues in the House of Commons has been crucial to key campaigns in recent months, including attacks on firefighters, pensions and regional controls, as well as the potential legislative consequences of last December's Buncefield fire.



◆ Campaigners are calling for protest letters to be sent to foreign secretary Jack Straw, MPs and MEPs over the decision of the European Union to suspend all direct aid to the Palestinian authority. The move, following an internationally-recognised democratic election in Palestine, is adding to the plight of Palestinian civilians, 64% of whom live in poverty and dozens of whom have been killed since the January elections in Israeli military attacks. For more information visit [www.palestinecampaign.org.uk](http://www.palestinecampaign.org.uk).

JESS HIRRO/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Yorkshire terriers can be a man's best friends – and certainly less terrifying to South Yorkshire brigade leadership than talking to its firefighters

## FIFTH COLUMN

An anonymous take on events in a brigade near you

**S**outh Yorkshire Fire Authority recently approved the plans of chief fire officer Mark Smitherman to treble senior manager posts at a cost of £410,000, whilst at the same time scrapping appliances and merging fire stations with the cost of around 35 firefighter posts.

Widespread opposition to the IRMP proposals included local MPs, councillors and members of the public – 16,000 signed a petition against the plans. This management restructure is the second in as many years and follows a huge payout to consultants who again have moved the deckchairs on the Titanic.

South Yorkshire's brigade management team has a chequered history. It recently proposed to buy back outstanding leave. Firefighters have been unable or not allowed to take leave due to a chronic shortage of staff that was recently running at 90 establishment vacancies.

South Yorkshire was given a "weak" rating in a recent comprehensive performance assessment that also criticised communications with staff.

### Towards industrial action

Industrial relations are at an all time low with over 30 disputes lodged and the brigade edging towards industrial action again. FBU members are supporting the call for strike action in huge numbers and are increasingly angry at what they see as the attitude and autocratic nature

### SOUTH YORKSHIRE

**CFO  
Smitherman  
is looking  
forward to a  
partnership  
with dogs**

of the recently appointed management team. They have recent experience of management's tactics and attitude after fighting off a 90-day notice on a change to duty systems which was proposed without any negotiation. This was eventually withdrawn due to the strength of opposition.

### No meetings

It seems the concept of partnership with his workers is lost on Mr Smitherman as he has refused to meet FBU brigade officials. All discussions have been delegated to a recently appointed HR manager with a huge experience of fire service issues gained through working in the NHS and a county council.

It would seem this has spread to South Yorkshire Fire Authority which has scrapped all formal meetings and structures that were formed some years ago by the NJC joint secretaries.

These structures kept industrial peace for many years. While not always agreeing, there was a commitment to partnership working in these forums.

It is pleasing to note that this reluctance to work together does not apply to all sectors of the community. A recent laudable scheme to train unwanted dogs to aid the disabled to alert the emergency services received the CFO's unqualified support. Mr Smitherman said: "they were thrilled to welcome the dogs onto their team, who have proven themselves as man's best friend, and we look forward to working in partnership with these dogs".



# Trade justice

LOUISE RICHARDS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, WAR ON WANT

“It can be tough to find the link between what happens abroad and life in your own back yard. When it comes to the economic complexities of world trade this becomes not only distant, but also tied up in economic dogma and painfully dull negotiations. The recent World Trade talks in Hong Kong barely made an impact in the media in the UK – but the implications for those living in poverty are huge.

In December 2005 the World Trade Organisation met in Hong Kong to try and forge a deal that, in their words, would be a ‘development agenda’. The reality behind the fluffy words was very different. In secret negotiations, behind closed doors, rich countries worked to force open the economies of developing countries – gaining hugely lucrative access to their industrial and financial sectors, while giving nothing in return.

On agriculture, while the European Union finally agreed an end date for the damaging domestic subsidies which lead to cheap produce being ‘dumped’ on developing countries, devastating the small farmers in those countries – far more damaging subsidies are being kept on.

Big business lobbyists work behind the scenes to make sure the interests of the rich are protected, that profits are secured. Each time they win, millions across the world face unemployment, poverty and hardship. This pro corporate stance taken by rich countries was met with huge resistance by protestors all over the world. Some incredibly poor farm workers, migrant workers and others had made the costly and difficult journey from Korea, Indonesia, Africa and other places to protest to protect their livelihoods. If they can make the effort, we should too.

Public provision of essential services is under attack, with rich nations forcing a ‘one size fits all’ model of development on poor countries, the aim being to defame and defund public services in favour of global privatisation for the benefit of multinational companies. A War on Want report published last year exposed how the UK government was making its aid money conditional on the privatisation of basic services. Thanks to campaigning by NGOs and trade unions, the UK pledged to stop this damaging practice, but as far as many in power are concerned, privatisation is the only game in town.

Needless to say, this corporate agenda across a whole range of issues, which are essential for development, leaves workers in a dangerous position. Widely publicised abuses of workers’

rights, like factories in Asia producing clothes for Nike show up how big business interests devastate the poor. Nike argued that the factories were sub contracting for them, and as such, Nike bore none of the responsibility for its source factories. This is a weightless argument – the low supply costs demanded by multinationals like Nike often lead to poor pay and conditions. It is, therefore, essential that governments pass legislation holding big business to account for their actions in all environments in which they operate. War on Want is campaigning for amendments to the Company Law Reform Bill currently passing through parliament, to ensure that people overseas who are harmed by the activities of a UK company are able to use the UK legal system to take action.

So what can you do? The first thing is to realise that what we all do in this country has a massive effect overseas. Globalisation has meant that the world has, in effect, got much smaller. If you shop in Asda, for example, you are funding Wal-Mart, the American supermarket giant which has an absolutely atrocious record in terms of workers’ rights both in this country and abroad. Why not buy fair trade products instead? It might seem like a small contribution, but it could make a world of difference – and you can be happy in the knowledge that the farmer who produced the product will be getting a fair price for their coffee or bananas or whatever it might be. Look for the Fair Trade mark in supermarkets.

If you want to take it further, then join War on Want’s campaign for trade justice. Whether it’s demanding that the government stops its assault on the emerging economies of poor countries or writing to your MP urging them to support tougher laws on big business, you can make a real difference to poor workers’ lives. How about asking your bosses to provide fair trade tea and coffee in the mess rooms at your stations?

It is essential that people like you get involved in some way. The trade union movement has a proud history of standing in solidarity with the oppressed and poor in developing countries. The current round of trade talks look like they’re going to offer nothing to make the lives of the poor any better. In fact, the deal being pushed by rich countries would worsen poverty in many countries. So over to you. Make your voice heard, make your actions count. It’s time for trade justice.

”

→ For more info: [www.waronwant.org](http://www.waronwant.org)





Coffee picking: You can  
make a difference by  
looking for the Fair Trade  
mark when you shop

# Ready, willing

An FBU firefighter who suffered a serious leg injury in a motorcycle crash nearly two years ago has returned to active duty with a false limb – a first in the UK and Europe. Simon Hawkins told *Firefighter* how he did it

**T**o be involved in a serious road accident would be a real-life drama for anybody. For Simon Hawkins, a firefighter for 11 years in Hereford and Worcestershire and a keen sportsman, the motorcycle crash in July 2004 was a double blow. “When I found out I’d lose part of my leg – doctors saved my life but were forced to amputate my lower left leg – I broke down. I cried for two–three days,” says Simon, who is 31 years old.

“I thought it was the end of my life – I thought I’d lost my mobility and my career as well. Until then I had been very active – I considered myself an athlete, running since 14 years old. And I played football every Sunday. I loved being in the fire service. Many firefighters will tell you this – it’s not just a job, it’s a way of life, a vocation. I always wanted to be a firefighter.”

But in February this year, after showing a determination that staggered colleagues, Simon was back at work on full operational duties at Bromsgrove fire station, with a prosthetic leg – the first firefighter in the UK and Europe to achieve this.

This epic journey to reclaim a career Simon thought he once had lost tested his patience as well as his physical abilities. Fortunately, he enjoyed solid support from his watch, brigade and the Union. “My brigade was fantastic. They concentrated on getting me back on my feet, they said: ‘let’s make sure you are fit and we’ll take it from there.’ Nobody knew if I would be able to go into operational work. They gave me an admin job and kept me in uniform. I also had tremendous support from my family, my friends and work colleagues. The Union too, were supportive.”

Simon returned to the brigade in an administrative post five months after the accident. Twelve months down the line the breakthrough came. “It was at the point when I got my brand new prosthetic leg – thanks to the incredible fundraising efforts of friends and family. I could do a bit of painting and decorating, I could walk with a limp. It let me do nearly everything I did before. It was always at the back of my mind, but a year after the accident I could actually see myself getting back to work operationally. I wanted to see myself back to work within six months. That was very much my plan and I made the decision to start training for work assessments, going out with the watches and training for everything and

## AN INCREDIBLY POSITIVE OUTLOOK

FBU health and safety rep Pug Molloy was as impressed with Simon as so many others in the brigade.

“Simon’s a bit of a star. At times we’ve had to restrain him from going over the top in his eagerness to get back on the job. He’s got an incredibly positive outlook.”

Pug was monitoring Simon’s return to work liaising with the brigade health and safety department as well as the watch, who are “very happy”, Pug says.

“I have to ensure that the procedure that was put in place to test Simon’s ability to get back to work was fair. Rather than create insurmountable tasks, the brigade had to ensure he should get a fair crack of the whip.”

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, which applied to firefighters from April 2004, certainly made the process of getting Simon back to work a lot easier, says Pug.

“Now, a brigade has to prove he’s not capable of doing the job. We said to management – ‘you’ll have to prove to us he can’t do it’.

“If they had done so in a fair manner, we’d have accepted it. As it happened, it went the other way, and Simon is now back.

“We are on new ground here – we have to ensure Simon’s long-term health and safety

“There are some remaining difficulties, but he’s up to the same standards as others on the watch.”

seeing where my capabilities were and my limitations.”

“I ended up doing it in seven months. Personally speaking I could have done it in five months, but the brigade had to watch out for my health and safety and be very careful about how the assessments and training were done. I can’t fault them, but physically I felt that I could have come back to full operational duties a lot earlier. I just had to bide my time and wait.”

To begin with Simon underwent risk assessments using the prosthesis on every possible firefighting activity – seven major core skills – including breathing apparatus, ladders, road traffic collisions and pumping. “I probably spent the first month and a half writing risk assessments and making sure from a health and safety point of view that I and the brigade were covered should anything ever happen. It was really a paper exercise that I’d done everything properly. It involved devising a possible way of assessing myself on the drill yard and identifying what the high and low risks were.”

Once that was done, Simon produced his evidence to his line manager, Ian Davis, who was impressed. And from this self-assessment out in the training yard, the brigade drew up a list of assessments that they would test Simon against. The process took Simon to Chorley in Lancashire, Smethwick in Birmingham and to his own station at Bromsgrove. “Although I was being tested for competency in general, the main assessment was me using my prosthesis and how I adapted my movements and working regime,” says Simon.

The story of Simon’s return was filmed and televised just a week



PICTURES: ANITA MARIC/NEWTEAM INTERNATIONAL

Simon celebrates his return with work colleagues



# and able



Simon is climbing ladders again

before he was welcomed back into the fold at Bromsgrove as part of the firefighting team. "I rang the BBC and asked if they would like to do a documentary on me getting back to work. They came down to talk to me about it and once they'd met me they realised I was quite serious."

The BBC's *Inside Out* followed Simon for six months through the training and assessments. And as part of the documentary, they took him to America to meet Bill Henry, the first amputee firefighter in the world. Bill, who works for the fire service in Volusia County, Florida, has been back to active duties since 2001. "I met Bill Henry in January, three weeks before I went back operational and I was waiting for a decision from the brigade. He's been doing it for four, five years."

For the first eight weeks back in the job, Simon was broken in gently. "I'm still not allowed to do any structural firefighting, but I'm deemed competent on an operational basis on everything else. It's particularly good to be back driving. It's not nice having restrictions, but you have to play the game."

So what has Simon learned from the whole experience and does he have any words of advice for fellow FBU members who suffer a major disability? "I've got a lot of close friends in the fire service including my watch and friends of the family. They were absolutely amazing. They organised events and raised £20,000 in three months for me to get the prosthesis. They did it through car washes, collections, raffles and small funding raising events. It was incredible that people thought that much of me. It is a very humbling feeling to realise that people care that much about you. And that includes the public, who don't even know me and have given me money because it's a good cause."

"What I also learned from the experience is that it's important to have a never-give-up attitude. It's important to try to maintain that positive mental attitude all the time. Make a positive out of a negative, if you like. I know from my own experience that it's very hard to do sometimes, especially when you think your job is at an end. You've just got to think: 'well this has happened to me but I've just got to get on with it, I've just got to learn to adapt and overcome', which is very much what firefighters do anyway in their everyday jobs."

➔ More: [www.fbu.org.uk/workplace/fairnesswork/](http://www.fbu.org.uk/workplace/fairnesswork/)



The prosthesis didn't stop Simon becoming operational once again

# STILL DYING FOR A FAG

Firesafe cigarettes could prevent 2,500 fires a year and save hundreds of lives. Who says so? The Government. So why does it drag its feet on the issue?



The introduction of cigarettes which put themselves out could slash the number of accidental house fires and the number of people killed and injured in those fires, new research shows. Independent research from ODPM (*Fire Research Report 8*) demonstrates that the introduction of “firesafe” cigarettes could cut the number of accidental house fires caused by smouldering cigarettes by two-thirds each year from 4,159 to 1,615, a reduction of 2,544.

The number of fatalities, the research indicated, could be cut by two thirds from 123 to 45, saving 78 lives. The number of injuries could also be cut by two thirds, from 1,416 to 530, saving 886 people from injury.

The obvious benefits of reduced ignition potential cigarettes – known as “firesafe” – are the lives saved and injuries avoided if they were introduced into the UK or even made compulsory. The reduction in deaths and injuries would be a major step towards the goal of zero fire deaths, a target the union’s less imaginative critics thought unachievable.

The technology to create “firesafe” cigarettes already exists, with 25 “firesafe” brands available on the US market and compulsory in New York and soon to be so in Canada. This despite the tobacco industry having a history of blocking moves to introduce legislation to force them to produce firesafe cigarettes.

## Most dangerous

In the US the tobacco industry had previously dismissed the link between cigarettes and fire deaths as merely a “public perception”. But *Fire Statistics 2003*, published by ODPM, highlighted the clear link between fire deaths and smouldering cigarettes in the UK. It concluded that: “Smoking related fires remain the most dangerous type of household fire.”

The 2003 fire statistics – published in March last year – showed that 125 people died in smoking related fires in 2003. Nine out of ten of those deaths (113) were the result of smouldering cigarettes causing fires. In the years 1999-2003 a total of 647 people died in smoking related fires; 582 of those deaths were caused by fires started by smouldering cigarettes. While “stub it out” campaigns may have helped reduce the number of smoking related fires, the number of fire deaths caused by poorly extinguished cigarettes has proved harder to push down.

In the UK it took the FBU and Action on Smoking and Health to make the link between “firesafe” cigarette technology



**‘If we can make furniture safer in fires, we can make cigarettes safer, save lives and reduce injuries’**

and the numbers of deaths and injuries caused by smouldering cigarettes in the UK.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: “There is a significant link between smouldering cigarettes and deaths in dwelling fires. It is highly likely that those who die in these fires will be from the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society.

“Smoking related fires in the home are the most dangerous fires. They are far more likely to kill people. They account for less than one in ten accidental fires in the home but cause a third of all accidental fire deaths in the home.

“If we can make furniture safer in fires, we can make cigarettes safer, save lives and reduce injuries. The union has shown it is prepared to think very imaginatively, as part of our NO2 campaign, to drive down fire deaths and injuries”



Smoking related fires in the home are the most dangerous fires

RUI VIEIRA/PA/EMPICS

#### OPDM REPORT

Based on the fire statistics in Table 2, smokers' materials, excluding matches and lighters, accounted for 4,159 fires, 123 fatalities and 1,416 non-fatal casualties in 2003. If the results from this limited programme of work are truly representative of (a) the differences between typical UK cigarettes and typical USA RIP (Reduced Ignition Potential) cigarettes, and (b) the furnishing materials actually ignited in UK domestic fires, the probability of ignition could be reduced from 91% to 69% for Camel and 34% for Merit.

Further extrapolation shows:

	Standard	Camel	Merit
Number of fires	4,159	3,277	1,615
Fatalities	123	93	45
Non-fatal casualties	1,416	1075	530

**Source** ODPM Fire Research Report 8, Comparisons of the propensity of fire safe cigarettes and conventional cigarettes to ignite textile materials used in a domestic environment, January 2006.

#### BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL

The *British Medical Journal* in October 2002 (The case for fire safe cigarettes made through industry documents by M Gunja, G Ferris Wayne, A Landman, G Connolly and A McGuire) showed that cigarette linked fires accounted for one on ten fire deaths across the world. The article explained how a fire safe cigarette worked: “A fire safe cigarette either has a lower propensity to ignite substrates (even though the cigarette burns its entire length) or will self extinguish when left unpudded for an extended period.”

Significant research into such a cigarette increased in the 1970s and by the end of the decade 33 patents for firesafe cigarettes had been issued in the US. The first patent had been issued in 1854.

The tobacco industry had pursued fire safe research for decades, and dozens of prototypes were developed. But the industry made public statements that obscured the progress in its own research, and acted to block legislative change. Privately the industry was upbeat about the chances of creating such a cigarette and in 2000 Philip Morris introduced fire safe paper technology in their Merit cigarettes (those mentioned in the research trial).

According to the company's press release launching the new firesafe brand: “The patented cigarette paper ... has rings of ultra-thin paper that are applied on top of traditional cigarette paper during the paper making process. These rings act as “speed bumps” to slow down the rate at which the cigarette burns as the lit end crosses over them.”

**Source** *British Medical Journal*: The case for fire safe cigarettes made through industry documents. Tobacco Control 2002; 11 (4): 346-353. <http://tc.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/abstract/11/4/346>

Centrally driven pressure for 'efficiency savings' is leading to moves by fire authorities to make cuts in frontline services from Cambridgeshire to Northumberland

# Heroes to zeros

**T**he pressure is on the fire service to deliver "efficiency savings" and brigades have been turning to cuts in frontline services to find the cash. In some, the pressure has been coming from other areas and other reasons – PFI deals for example.

The pressure for cuts is coming from the Treasury through what is known as the "Gershon review". Set up in 2004, this seeks to ease the pressure for tax increases by putting the squeeze on public spending while claiming to protect "frontline" services.

Sir Peter Gershon demanded "efficiency savings" across the public services between now and the end of the 2008 financial year. In the fire service those savings amount to a total of £105 million from the fire authorities in England.

ODPM *Fire Service Circular 8-2005* set out global "efficiency savings" across fire services in England over a three year period beginning with 1.6% savings in 2005/6, rising to 3.6% savings in 2006/7 and peaking at 5% savings in 2007/8.

The ODPM has been typically slippery in an attempt to avoid being blamed for cuts in local services.

The circular says it is not a set target for each authority: "That is why we have gone for one target for all of the English FRAs together rather than a blanket target for every FRA. English FRAs as a whole will therefore need to work together to ensure that the target is met." (Para 2.5)

"We would ask questions of any FRAs failing to achieve these levels but they would not automatically be deemed to have failed to make a sufficient contribution to the target. This is because we recognise that some FRAs will have greater capacity for making efficiencies than others." (Para 2.5)

"So finding efficiencies is not about cutting frontline services for users. Indeed any saving that leads to a material reduction in performance cannot properly be counted as an improvement in efficiency." (Para 2.9)

ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP

## LOCAL CAMPAIGNS

### NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council is set to press on with the closure of four fire stations after chief officer Brian Hesler secured backing for his controversial plans. The hugely expensive PFI-funded project will see Blyth, Cramlington, Ashington and Morpeth stations closed and two new ones built in Pegswood and West Hartford.

The private finance initiative costs will rise from £10 million to £35 million over the period of the project and the stations are expected to be built within the next two years. The value for money of PFI deals, particularly for small-scale projects, has been seriously questioned by independent experts.

The plans, famously described as suitable for "Noddyland" by local Labour MP Ronnie Campbell, were rubber-stamped after Labour councillors were instructed to back them or face disciplinary action. The local FBU had presented a petition signed by 20,000 people opposing the plans.

"The plans would mean the closure

of fire stations and cutting one in five firefighters in the most populated area of Northumberland to fund a very expensive PFI deal," said Northumberland FBU Secretary Kieran Brennan. "These firefighters have a dual role of providing community safety education and responding to emergencies.

"Cutting the frontline service will only provide a worse service to the public. The costs of the plan will soar to almost £35 million over the full period of the contract.

"It is a complete waste of money because it will do nothing to improve the service to the public. It will only put lives at risk by increasing response times to emergencies for the vast majority of people in our communities."

Colin James, Northumberland FBU Chair, said: "These plans will mean a worse service which is more expensive. Our alternative plans would mean effective response times, better community safety and cost council tax payers no extra money."

Alan McLean, FBU executive member for the north east region, who attended the council meeting that backed the plans, said the result was a stain on the democratic process. "Our campaign exposed and destroyed all the arguments for these proposals, which have no public backing at

all. These councillors should be ashamed of what they have done but our fight to stop this goes on."

Councillor Wayne Daley who voted against the plans said afterwards: "These changes will not help improve the service for the people of Northumberland. They will simply increase response times.

"The FBU recognises that things have to change, the union isn't full of dinosaurs. But the way this whole process has been handled is very disappointing."

### HERTFORDSHIRE

Hertfordshire members have been balloting for industrial action over plans to cut emergency response firefighter posts and close two fire stations. Almost all of the cuts will fall in the highest risk area of the county and on the stations that were the first to respond to the Buncefield fire.

The move follows a meeting of reps from fire stations across the county which decided unanimously to ballot for industrial action. There will be cuts at nights and weekends, fewer rescue appliances, fewer firefighters on fire engines and a longer wait for crews to arrive to 999 calls.

Response times would extend from the average seven minutes from time of call to





FBU members protest against cuts outside Hertfordshire F&RS HQ

## ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP ROUND UP

arrival at incident at present to ten minutes from the time the station is notified to arrival. Even that time would be missed at ten fires a week.

Up to 50 frontline firefighter posts would go, Radlett and Bovingdon stations would close and Watford and Royston stations would be downgraded. The major and expanding population centres of Stevenage, Hemel Hempstead and St Albans would lose a total of 12 frontline firefighter posts and three command and control officer posts would also go.

Hertfordshire FBU vice-chair Tony Smith said: "No one wants to take any form of industrial action, but we will not stand back and watch our service being torn apart. Feelings are running very high with most of us shocked and angered at the decision by councillors to push forward with these cuts.

"This is about old fashioned budget cuts to save the equivalent of the cost of a penny a week for everyone in the county. To increase risk to save peanuts does not make any sense.

"We live and work in the communities we serve and we know better than budget cutting councillors what these savage cuts will mean. There would be fewer frontline firefighters responding more slowly to 999

calls with less rescue equipment available.

"The cuts would make the public less safe and fire crews less safe. We do not want to take this action and we would seriously urge councillors to think again."

### CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Cambridgeshire FBU has been campaigning to restore 24 posts lost 12 months ago and has been close to calling an industrial action ballot over the fire authority's foot-dragging on the issue that has led to staff shortages and serious safety concerns.

The local FBU said the fire authority appeared to have a cavalier attitude to the safety of its firefighters.

The job cuts, implemented last year despite serious objections by fire crews, have led to a shortage of firefighters, unsafe working practices and a shortage of available appliances.

Adrian Clarke, Cambridgeshire FBU's acting regional official, said: "We have tried for nearly a year to resolve this and the situation on the ground is desperate.

"They have taken no steps to restore the job losses or deliver safe crewing arrangements.

"There are not enough firefighters to safely crew fire engines and other specialist

appliances. A growing number are either being crewed with only four personnel instead of five or are unavailable to respond to emergency calls because of staff shortages.

"Specialist rescue equipment, the turntable ladders and rescue vehicles at Peterborough and Cambridge, are now not always available or subject to delay. It is unacceptable that delays and staff shortages at incidents are forcing fire crews to adopt unsafe working practices.

"We are gravely concerned at the fire authority's apparent cavalier attitude towards the health and safety of fire crews at emergency incidents.

"While in the future overtime can be used in certain circumstances, it cannot and should not be used to replace the number of firefighters employed delivering fire cover to the communities in Cambridgeshire.

"The 24 frontline firefighter posts cut last year need to be restored. More wholetime and retained duty firefighters must be recruited to end the policy of deliberately running the service short-staffed.

"We need a system that ensures the turntable ladders and rescue vehicles in Peterborough and Cambridge are available at all times."



# WHAT DOES A NEW DIMENSION INSTRUCTOR DO?

Ian Harrison says there is a lot of job satisfaction in helping deliver additional resources to the fire and rescue service



Ian Harrison at work with colleagues at the Fire Service College in Moreton-in-the-Marsh



**W**hen the biggest fire in peacetime Europe raged in Hertfordshire before Christmas, fire crews used 15 state-of-the-art high volume pumps (HVPs) to douse the conflagration.

At that stage, the equipment had only been partially rolled out as part of the New Dimension programme, the government's contingency plan for responding to major emergencies in England and Wales.

But it was enough to make a vital difference to the outcome of the pollutant-belching blaze at Buncefield oil depot, according to New Dimension instructor Ian Harrison.

He spent nearly a week

helping to co-ordinate fire crews using the new equipment to attack the Buncefield blaze, which left 43 people injured and blackened the skyline.

"If people hadn't been trained up to use the HVPs we'd never had put it out or been able to deal with the control of millions of litres of contaminated water run off," says Ian, currently seconded from Staffordshire Fire Service to the Fire Service College at Moreton-in-the-Marsh, where he is a visiting lecturer specialising in HVPs.

New Dimension instructors manage and deliver all aspects of training for new equipment in the service. Ian's first encounter with the New Dimension project was in Staffordshire when incident response units (IRUs) – designed for the speedy mass decontamination of the public in the event of large-scale accidents or terrorist attacks –





PICTURES: JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

## Local Hero

**SIMON ROBERTS**

Retford Rep

**In the frontline**



LUKE BOLD

Simon Roberts and fellow firefighters at Retford station in Nottinghamshire have found themselves in the frontline in resisting management attempts to get crews to do the job of trained paramedics.

The station was picked to pilot “co-responding” – which requires fire crews to be specifically despatched to medical emergencies. This is against union policy, and crews at the station felt it was not right to be asked to do work for which they are not properly qualified.

“We certainly didn’t choose this fight – but there are times when you have to stand by your principles,” Simon explains.

The station’s crews voted not to co-operate with instructions to “co-respond” and FBU members across Nottinghamshire voted four to one to refuse to allow the imposition of ambulance crew duties on their colleagues at Retford. Since early October last year every Retford firefighter who refuses to respond to such calls has had 10 per cent docked from their shift pay on the grounds that they are “partially performing.”

But, as Simon puts it: “How can we be partially performing if it wasn’t our job in the first place? Some of the calls they want us to attend are “category A” calls – anything from stabbing victims to pregnant women. Of course, saving lives is part of the job when we are called out to fires and road accidents. We have basic first aid training. But we are not trained paramedics or ambulance crews. It is not our job, and it’s also not fair on the public, who will be expecting an ambulance to turn up, not a fire engine.”

Simon only took on the rep’s job in September, and is full of praise for his colleagues at the station, and beyond. “It’s great to get messages of support from other stations and regions. We know there’s a lot at stake for fire crews across the country, and every message helps boost morale” So, keep them coming!

➔ Send messages of support to: Retford Fire Station, Wharf Road, Retford, Notts, DN22 6EN

\*The issue is expected to go to court this summer.

were introduced. He has since become closely associated with high volume pumps and at Buncefield he was affectionately referred to as “Mr HVP”.

All forces in England and Wales now have high volume pump instructors and officers who will manage incidents. Such management is seen as a multi-disciplinary challenge. Fire service officers and colleagues from the police, environmental agencies and water authorities are all involved. All have attended awareness courses to alert them to the implications of HVP use.

“When you shift such a massive amount of water as HVPs are capable of, the water authority and the environmental agency need to know,” Ian says.

“It is inter-agency working which is breaking new ground. And at Buncefield we proved it could deliver.”

He says it is both challenging and stimulating to be involved in pushing forward boundaries in New Dimension, working to tight deadlines to protect the public. Buncefield showed HVPs could cope very effectively with a huge fire, but they are also designed to be equally effective in dealing with large-scale floods, such as those in Carlisle in January 2005.

Ian is now taking a sideways step to become a temporary New Dimension assistant planner and evidently relishes his work. Asked if he feels a particular thrill at being involved at the cutting edge of firefighting he comments: “You can never take that away from the people who ride on lorries can you? But there is a lot of job satisfaction in being involved in something that is delivering, new additional resources locally and nationally into the fire service. Yes, there is a bit of a buzz.”

# Could you be at risk?

More than 2 million people in the UK have diabetes

## DIABETES

**D**iabetes — or to give it its full name, diabetes mellitus — is a common condition which occurs when the body can't use glucose (sugar) properly because of a lack of insulin in the body. Insulin is vital for life. It is a hormone produced by the pancreas that helps glucose to enter the cells where it is used as fuel by the body. As a result, people with diabetes have abnormally high levels of glucose in their blood.

There are currently 2.1 million people diagnosed with diabetes in the UK and estimates show that there are a further 750,000 people with the condition who are not aware of it.

### The different types of diabetes and how to manage the condition

There are two main types of diabetes.

**Type 1** diabetes develops when there is a severe lack of insulin in the body because most or all of the cells in the pancreas that produce it have been destroyed. This type

of diabetes usually appears in people under the age of 40, often in childhood. Type 1 diabetes develops quickly, usually over a few weeks, and symptoms are normally very obvious. Type 1 Diabetes is treated by insulin injections and diet.

**Type 2** diabetes develops when the body can still produce some insulin, though not enough for its needs, or when the insulin that the body produces does not work properly. This type of diabetes usually appears in people over the age of 40, though in South Asian and African-Caribbean people it often appears after the age of 25. Recently more children have been diagnosed with the condition, some as young as seven. Type 2 diabetes develops more slowly and the symptoms are usually less severe. Some people may not notice any symptoms at all and their diabetes is only picked up in a routine medical check up. Over three-quarters of people with diabetes have Type 2 diabetes.

Type 2 Diabetes is treated by diet alone, or by a combination of diet and tablets, or by a combination of diet and insulin injections.

The main aim of treatment of both types

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- ◆ Increased thirst
- ◆ Going to the loo all the time – especially at night
- ◆ Extreme tiredness
- ◆ Weight loss
- ◆ Genital itching or regular episodes of thrush
- ◆ Blurred vision

of diabetes is to achieve blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol levels as near to normal as possible. This, together with a healthy lifestyle, will help to improve wellbeing and protect against long-term damage to the eyes, kidneys, nerves, heart and major arteries.

Both types of diabetes are equally serious and lead to complications like blindness, heart disease, kidney failure, strokes and nerve damage that could lead to amputations.

### Who can develop diabetes?

The people who are most at risk of developing diabetes include

- ◆ People with a family history of diabetes
- ◆ People between 40 and 75
- ◆ People of South Asian or African-Caribbean origin
- ◆ People who are very overweight.

### The fire service survey

Diabetes UK, the charity for people with diabetes, has recently conducted a survey of firefighters and control staff with diabetes across the UK. The aim of the survey was to find out how the fire and rescue service has accommodated operational staff with diabetes since the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) was extended to cover the police, fire and prison services in October 2004.

Firefighters and control staff with diabetes should now be individually assessed before any decision is taken regarding their fitness to undertake duties such as driving or wearing breathing apparatus. Employers will also be surveyed to find out what policies they have and how they have been implemented. Diabetes UK plans to produce a report highlighting best practice that will be circulated in the fire service.

➔ More info: The Diabetes UK Careline (0845 120 2960) offers information and support on any aspect of managing diabetes.



BETMANN/CORBIS

Singer Johnny Cash died aged 71 from medical complications resulting from diabetes in September 2003



## Pensions and financial advice

**Q** At present there is much talk within the Retained Duty System about pensions. Where do FBU reps stand legally when it comes to advising members what to do?

**A** The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 prohibits a person giving "financial advice" unless he or she is authorised by the Financial Services Authority to do so. FBU reps are not authorised.

But "financial advice" for these purposes means advising a person to take up or dispose of "investments" and an entitlement under an occupational pension scheme such as the Firefighters Pension Scheme or the New Firefighters Pension Scheme is not an investment for these purposes.

FBU reps are perfectly entitled therefore to advise members of the benefits of joining one or other of the Firefighters Pension Schemes and can compare the benefit of doing so with other generic alternatives (such as personal pensions in general). They must not advise members to buy or to dispose of any particular investment which they are thinking of making or disposing of.

## House of Lords ruling and duty systems

**Q** My brigade will not let me apply for a transfer from my current role to any other similar role within the brigade on a differing duty system. The reason I have been given is because I am retained. In the light of the House of Lords ruling is this a justifiable reason and could it be upheld if legally challenged?

**A** There should be no issue under the House of Lords judgment. Certainly the House

SATOSHI KAMAYASHI



as at the date when the contribution is collected. There is nothing to prevent pensionable pay increasing but there is also nothing in the rules of the scheme to prevent it decreasing.

## Medical pension, permanently unfit

**Q** Pension circular 30/2004 states that a medical pension may be paid to individuals who are deemed unfit for duty in cases where redeployment cannot be found. Does this only apply to members who have been deemed permanently unfit by the Independent Medical Advisor or to members where the IMA has not stated permanent disability too?

**A** : In all cases it is a requirement before an ill health pension is paid out that this must be supported by the IMA subject to any appeal against that medical opinion.

## Refusing to cross picket lines

**Q** Strike action by local Government workers over the Local Government Pension Scheme means I may face Unison picket lines when going to work. Can FBU members legitimately refuse to cross a UNISON picket line?

**A** Any member doing so would remain liable to disciplinary proceedings or deductions of pay. Whether an employer would take that action is a separate matter, but that is the legal position.

→ Write in with your legal problem to [legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk](mailto:legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk) and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

## Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

of Lords decision would give no good reason for the denial. It would be down to the contract as to the circumstances in which transfers are allowed.

## LSI and pensions contributions

**Q** I have received the Long Service Increment for the last 10 years and have paid pension contributions on it and will, like my colleagues in the

fire service, lose half of the Increment this year, with the rest going in 2007. Is it lawful for my employer to have taken the pension contributions on it for that time, but not have to pay a pension that includes it when I retire?

**A** I am afraid so, yes. The amount of the pension is based on pensionable salary as at the date of retirement, but contributions are calculated on the rate of pensionable pay

# ‘My strike footage made it on to the BBC’

Whether filming anti-racist gigs, football fans or picket lines making documentaries is a real labour of love, says Alan Miles

**“W**hen I left school I worked as a runner for a film company in Soho for a year or so before getting itchy feet and going off travelling. I ended up in the French Alps and had a band out there for five years touring ski resorts. Back in England I went to a friend’s pass out parade – he was joining Hertfordshire fire service – and thought ‘this is the job for me.’

That brought me to the London Fire Brigade, and part way through my career I fancied getting back into film production, so did a degree at the University of Hertfordshire. Shift patterns meant I could do the course and keep the job going.

## Dispute kicks in

As I was finishing the course, the dispute was kicking in so I started taking my camera to loads of marches and demos, and making little propaganda videos for the FBU just off my own back which we sent round to fire stations in the London region.

I filmed the night of the nine-to-one strike ballot – and the infamous storming of Hampton House, the London Fire Brigade Headquarters. We had a demo outside when 150 firefighters decided to storm into the building while talks were going on and hold a sit-down protest.

The footage I shot was on the BBC news that night. Andy Gilchrist, FBU general secretary at the time, saw some of my films and when the first 48-hour strike kicked in, I was seconded by the union to document it, taking in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Belfast, Bristol and back to London, where Joe Strummer was doing a benefit gig for firefighters at Acton Town Hall.

Mick Jones was in the audience and he got up on stage and played with Joe – the first time they had played together since The Clash split up 20 years before.

I captured it all on film and made a documentary called *The Last Night London Burned*, which was all about the strike, the gig, and what turned out to

be the last time Joe Strummer played in public. The footage got shown at the Glastonbury Left Field stage, which is an arena for trade unionists, anti racists and other progressive forces at the festival. Then I started working with an organisation called Love Music, Hate Racism, putting on gigs and filming them, which got me interested in the whole history of the anti-racist movement.

## Rock Against Racism

I soon started working on *Who Shot The Sheriff?*, which was all about the Rock Against Racism movement which started up in 1976 after Eric Clapton stood on stage in Birmingham and said he agreed with Enoch Powell. That caused this massive reaction, getting loads of musicians together to say “No – we’re not having this”.

The film had its premiere in London last September with the band Hard-Fi who headlined the show, along with Two-Tone artists from the eighties – The Beat and Jerry Dammers – and a lot of Urban acts like Roll Deep.

I’ve just finished a 15-minute cut of the film, with Ms Dynamite doing the voiceover. Schools are going to use it in citizenship classes so pupils can learn and think about the role music plays in the anti-racism movement. The BNP are



The Specials on stage – from Alan Miles’ film *Who Shot the Sheriff?*







ANDREW WARD

#### ALAN MILES

Alan Miles is a firefighter at Soho Station in Central London. When not on duty, he uses his skills as a filmmaker to further the cause of anti-racism and trade unionism – and celebrate English football. He runs a production company – Mad Inertia – and a record label – Militant Entertainment.

targeting schools at the moment, handing out leaflets and CDs. So we are going to be fighting back in classrooms with *Who Shot the Sheriff?*.

We're currently working on a film about the World Cup – about England fans and reclaiming the George Cross flag back from the racist right. We are working with Kick It Out – short for Kick Racism Out of Football and Philosophy Football. It's all about how the far right has hijacked the George Cross, as the National Front did with the Union Jack in the seventies. Again we are trying to get it back – trying to make people proud of it again for the right reasons.

We'll be in Germany when the World Cup is on. It's all about humanising England fans, the vast majority of whom will be out there to celebrate football – not hooligans looking for trouble which is usually how they get portrayed. The working title's *I'm an Ingerland fan*. We'll also be following fans in England – blasting stereotypes, celebrating the diverse range of fans. We'll be filming in a pub in Southall for instance, where lots of black and Asian fans watch all the games.

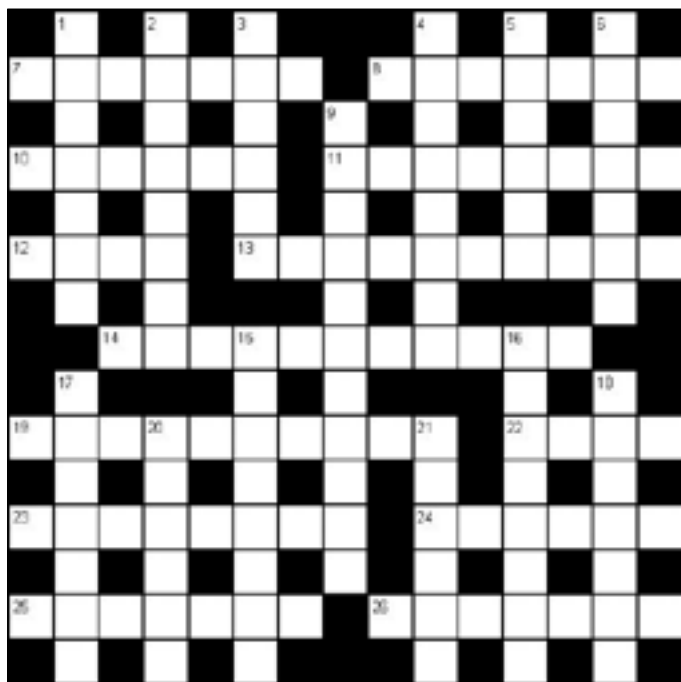
We're also just finishing off a film on the twentieth anniversary of the Worker's Beer Company – set up by Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Union Council to sell beer at festivals, raising funds for good causes all over the world.

#### No plans to quit

One of my big plans is to make the definitive strike documentary – what went well, what went wrong. I've got 150 hours of stuff from the dispute in the can. I'd like to start working on that next year. But I've certainly got no plans to quit being a firefighter. It's what I love doing. It is tight sometimes, but I really enjoy it and I get a lot of support from my watch. I've been doing it for ten years – and being a firefighter has helped open the door to other stuff I want to do. It fits in pretty well, and I plan to stick around."

➔ [www.madinertia.co.uk/](http://www.madinertia.co.uk/)

## Quick Crossword

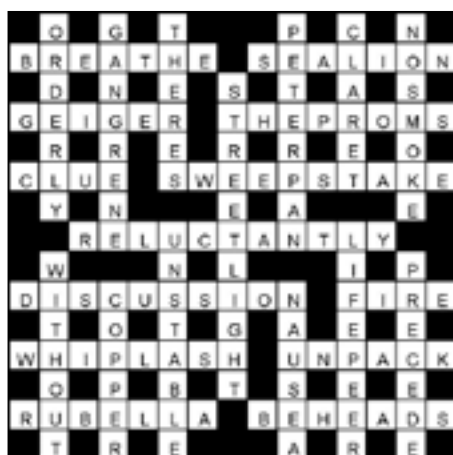


### Across

- 7 Liza Minnelli film (7)
- 8 Sporting adjudicator (7)
- 10 Knife or short sword for stabbing (6)
- 11 A lot more than just a headache! (8)
- 12 Male pig (4)
- 13 Expert in one area, particularly medicine (10)
- 14 Aimed at gardeners, not firefighters! (8,3)
- 19 Skin condition (10)
- 22 One who works when he or she really shouldn't (4)
- 23 Fatal; end of the line (8)
- 24 King who demonstrated his lack of divine power (6)
- 25 Pickling agent; sprinkle it on your chips (7)
- 26 Clothed (7)

### Down

- 1 Bullfighter (7)
- 2 Australian marsupial (8)
- 3 Wreckage, ruins, rubbish – left after fire? (6)
- 4 It'll do this if you don't make sure it's out! (2-6)
- 5 Remember (6)
- 6 Sharpest; most eager (7)
- 9 Straight away (11)
- 15 Citizen of Baltic state (8)
- 16 Firefighter's worst enemy? (8)
- 17 Social security payment; charity gig (7)
- 18 Workplace eatery or cutlery set (7)
- 20 One who belongs, to the union for example (6)
- 21 Make fast; safe (6)



Solution to  
April crossword



ALL ACTION/EMPICS

## Prize Quiz

### Win a portable DVD player

Enter our prize quiz and it could be yours. This month fire in literature. Just name the six books by solving the clues.

**1** Most recent offering from J K Rowling in a series of books about adolescence, magic and wizards

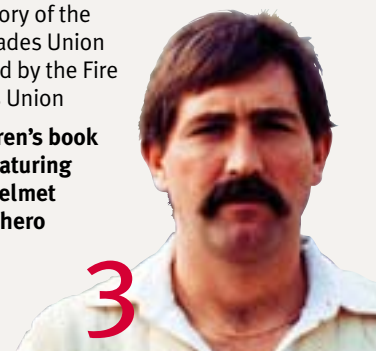
**2** A book produced in commemoration of Joe Strummer who sadly died two weeks after performing at an FBU benefit gig in November 2002

**3** A personal account of a year as England's cricket captain in 1990 when he scored an amazing 333 against India at Lord's

**4** Cookey book by well-known slightly eccentric chef with a fondness for wine who is probably lucky not to have set himself on fire

**5** A history of the Fire Brigades Union published by the Fire Brigades Union

**6** Children's book series featuring yellow helmet wearing hero



ALASTAIR GRANT/AP/EMPICS

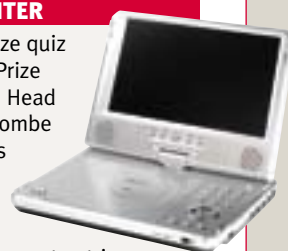
ALPHA/EMPICS

Answers to  
April quiz:  
1. Towering Inferno  
2. Backdraft  
3. Ladder 49  
4. Rescue Me  
5. The Guys  
6. Hellfighters

Winner of the iPod  
in our March quiz  
was Gary Parker of  
Wigan

### HOW TO ENTER

Send your answers to the prize quiz by 31 May on a postcard to: Prize Competition (May 2006) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston Upon Thames KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.





# StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

## Short paws



My NO DPM contacts say they were wounded by revelations (March Station Cat) of their inability to get tax discs for the New Dimension IRUs for which they are responsible. The result was that half the IRUs were taken off the run and some brigades were left with no capability to deal with chemical incidents.

**The free discs – the vehicles are tax exempt but still have to display discs – ended up costing the taxpayer £16,000** for special

couriers to distribute them. They suggest laying off them for a bit.

(Short pause as I lay off them). Back again. As at 31 December 550 staff worked in the NO DPM Local Government and Fire Group running up total salary costs of £23,762,000 plus administration costs of £29,825,000. A grand total just in excess of £53 million a year with admin costs outweighing salary costs by some margin.

This works out at an annual average of £43,147 salary costs per head plus £54,156 admin costs per head giving a grand average of £97,300 in salary and admin costs for every Civil Servant at NO DPM every year.

Now, as many civil servants are very low paid, it suggests that the pay at the upper echelons must be considerable, with a fair few on those senior grades. No doubt including some of those who can't get the tax discs out in time.

## Dot com boom



What's this? I am told of a "two email address" system. Many in the fire service get emails from what look like NO DPM staffers as they are from @odpm.gsi.gov.uk.

But exactly the same people also have the same email name finishing with the address @paconsulting.com. The explanation is that there are large numbers of these @paconsulting.com bods working on the FireControl project, poor things.

Or not so poor as I am told. **PA Consulting have comfortably passed the**



It never happened – because NO DPM paid couriers £16,000 to deliver free tax exemption discs

**£10 million milestone in fees.** Let's put that in context for you. The Community Fire Safety Innovation Fund was given £4.5 million between 2003 and 2006. The Arson Control Forum was provided with £11.3 million over the same period.

Wonder how much better both could have done sharing another £10 million funding instead of spending it on highly paid consultants working on a project which has such little support.

## AC Merseyside



And so to the NO DPM abacus counters, known by their official title as the Audit Commission.

Who audits their performance?

After all, they charge around £4 million for their work on the fire service nationally.

No one I am told, which suggests a host of questions for the future. Are they value for money? You decide.

Merseyside fire authority were brilliant when it came to finances, according to the Audit Commission in its CPA published in July 2005. The Commission trumpeted: "Financial management is sound and is supported by effective plans, including a five-year medium-term financial strategy. This allows the Authority to plan ahead, anticipating the implications of future income and expenditure. There is a well-developed financial risk management process and rigorous monitoring."

Are there no bounds to the brilliance of Merseyside? No: "The Authority has

strengthened its financial position in recent years.... Members are fully involved in key financial decisions and are kept informed by comprehensive quarterly budget monitoring reports."

Who can doubt the weight of the Audit Commission overall conclusion: "Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority is rated by this assessment as excellent." Top marks, brilliant, head of the class, strut your stuff among the other fire authorities. Look at us! **Sadly, and disastrously, it was not to last. Merseyside has suddenly hit a record budget shortfall of £8.5 million.** What

about the sound financial planning, effective plans and strengthened financial position outlined by the Audit Commission?

I ask some of the friendlier, but now red-faced, AC bods. But, as they sing at football matches, "it's all gone quiet over there".

## Curse of the Station Cat



*Personnel Today* appears to have been a bit too quick to claim that a new breed of Human Resource managers were taking over the fire service (Station Cat, April). *PT* quoted Peter Brook of Greater Manchester: "HR professionals are in the vanguard of change at the fire service and are undoubtedly helping to usher in some important reforms. We have introduced many changes to the service in the past few months and have had to walk through an industrial relations minefield to do so."

In Mr Brook's case the vanguard appears to have been ushered in a different direction. **Within days of his first appearance in Station Cat, Mr Brook decided he had had enough of walking through minefields in the fire service and decided to walk away from GMC.** In Manchester Mr Brook's departure has started the legend of The Curse of the Station Cat. Be warned, it is no legend. Keep the stories coming readers.

→ If you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into then e-mail: stationcat@fbu.org.uk

# 25-year badges



**Dave Drury (right)** Lincoln South being presented with his 25 year badge from Chris Hides (branch sec) Lincoln South



**Gerry Cook (right)** Lincoln South being presented with his 25 year badge from Chris Hides (branch sec) Lincoln South



**Tim Evans (right)** Lincoln South being presented with his 25 year badge from Chris Hides (branch sec) Lincoln South



**John Lucas (right)** Edmonton White Watch presented 25 year badge by Barry Payton, Branch Secretary



**Rowley Minos (right)** Enfield White Watch presented 25 year badge by Barry Payton, Edmonton Branch Secretary



**FF Hector Wishart (left)** Ballymena Branch, receives his 25 year badge from R2 Secretary Tony Maguire



**Asst. Group Commander Geoff Bannerman (left)** Western Area, receives his 25 year badge from R2 Secretary Tony Maguire



**Station Commander John Moran (left)** Western Area, receives his 25 year badge from R2 Secretary Tony Maguire



**Group Commander Gerry Warren (left)** Western Area, receives his 25 year badge from R2 Secretary Tony Maguire

Please send your photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or [firefighter@fbu.org.uk](mailto:firefighter@fbu.org.uk) (Please note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include **FULL DETAILS** for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.



**Rory Stewart (left)** receiving his badge from branch rep Julian Gifford at Manchester Square (on the last day at A22), London (June 2005) Blue watch

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0117 935 5132  
[13rs@fbu.org.uk](mailto:13rs@fbu.org.uk)

## CHANGE OF ADDRESS OR NEXT OF KIN

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

## FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

**0808 100 6061**

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues**. For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

